



TWINS REPORT

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NOTES

Valentin still chasing dream

By La Velle E. Neal III
Star Tribune Staff Writer

DETROIT — When **Javier Valentin** singled in the ninth inning Wednesday, it was his first hit in the majors since Sept. 20, 1999.

"It felt like my rookie year," Valentin said. "I wanted to ask for the ball."

Twins bandwagon hoppers might not know Valentin, who spent 1998 and 1999 as the backup catcher. But he's played at the Class AAA level in each of the past three seasons before getting called up last week. He batted .286 for Class AAA Edmonton this season, with 21 homers and 80 RBI.

Valentin, who turned 27 on Thursday, is a switch hitter with some power who can throw well. Inconsistency has held him back.

"I've been here before and I'm going to try to do the same things I did in the minors, play hard and wait for my chance," he said. "I

know I can play in the big leagues for a long time."

Twins manager **Ron Gardenhire** said Valentin still has a chance to carve out a major league career.

"He's still a young man," Gardenhire said. "He's had time here. He's had some problems with his knees, but he has pads that protect him, so that helps. He was catching about three times every six games down there [at Edmonton]. That's good enough for a backup role at this level."

Injury report

Corey Koskie (bruised right shin) and **Torii Hunter** (bruised right forearm) were back in the lineup Thursday. Left fielder **Jacque Jones** (sprained left ankle) and first baseman **Doug Mientkiewicz** (sore back) remained out.

Twins trainer **Jim Kahmann** said Jones remained a couple of days away from playing, but that the swelling had gone down considerably. He was injured Tuesday while trying to slide into second base.

Kahmann described it as a Grade 1 ankle sprain, in which the ligaments were stretched but not torn.

Mientkiewicz has been recuperating from a sore back.

"We talked [Thursday]," Gardenhire said. "He's probably one more day away."

Double ring

Matthew LeCroy and **Michael Cuddyer** have talked about the possibility of winning two championship rings this season.

They both were key players at Edmonton, which won the Pacific Coast League championship last week. And both, barring injury, will be on the Twins' post-season roster.

"That would be great," Cuddyer said. "Then I could give one of the rings to my family."

Uh, which one?

"The PCL ring," he said while laughing. "That's a no-brainer."

LeCroy was called up four times during the season, but never got discouraged.

"It's worth it," he said. "All the flights. All the frequent flier miles."

Big park

Player complaints have forced Tigers officials to consider moving the fences in at Comerica Park. On Thursday, a makeshift fence — about 15 feet in — was installed in left field during Detroit's batting practice. It was a way to evaluate the effects of a smaller field.

Comerica Park's center-field fence is 420 feet from home plate. The deep left-center gap is around 430 feet, and the power alleys are 385 feet. It's built for speed, not power.

Gardenhire said **Dustan Mohr** hit a drive to left on Tuesday that would have been out of any park in the majors, except Comerica.

"He came back in the dugout and started doing push-ups," Gardenhire said.

Etc.

> Twins General Manager **Terry Ryan** was asked before Thursday's game if outfielder **Mike Ryan** was any relation to him.

"Only if he hits," Ryan said.

They are not related. But Ryan collected hits in his first two at-bats Thursday.

TWINS from C1

Milton's performance brief but encouraging for lefty

The game, which will not be made up, was significant for Milton, who failed to get out of the second inning in his previous start Friday. He needed to show he was ready to make that October start. The Twins were so concerned about his sharpness, or lack thereof, they juggled the rotation to make sure he would get two more starts after Thursday to get his act together.

Although he pitched only two innings Thursday, he left an encouraging impression.

He hit 94 miles per hour on the radar gun, threw his breaking ball and hit his spots.

"I was just getting in a groove and getting loose," he said. "It was not my day. I'm finally feeling half-

decent and was getting the power out of my bottom half and using my legs more. That's where my velocity comes from, and I had it."

Radke and Mays have been moved up a day in the rotation so they can be on track to start Games 1 and 2 of the playoffs. Milton revealed his spot when asked if his remaining starts, on Tuesday and Sept. 29, were enough for him to be ready.

"Well, I'm scheduled for Game 4 of the playoffs, so that's a long ways away," said Milton, who returned to action on Sept. 2 following surgery on his left knee.

"I felt really good tonight. I can't see why I shouldn't be stronger. [Thursday] was good. I finally felt good and had some confidence."

Milton (13-9) hoped to cash in on a terrific offensive performance. Mike Ryan called up on Sunday, fouled off the first pitch of the game then singled to center for his first major league hit.

Every member of the starting lineup reached base, with the first out recorded on Torii Hunter's fielder's choice.

When a runner reaches base, he usually gives his batting gloves to the first base coach. After one time through the batting order, Twins first base coach Jerry White was holding fistfuls of gloves.

Ryan, an outfielder, didn't know where his gloves were when he came up to bat the second time in the inning. White searched himself and found Ryan's gloves in his back pocket.

Ryan slipped them on, then singled in two runs.

All this work went for naught. Ryan had two at-bats, two runs scored, two hits and two RBI — in one inning — but were wiped

out with the rainout.

"I was so excited, then so depressed, in an hour and a half," said Ryan, who had several family members from his hometown of Indiana, Pa., in attendance. "There's nothing I can do about it. I'm glad [family] was here to enjoy it... or not enjoy it."

Manager Ron Gardenhire said felt sorry for Ryan.

"We had Ryan get his first hit and had to take the darn ball away from him," he said.

Hunter, who had missed four of the past five games because of a strained right gluteus muscle, then a sore forearm, was despondent because his RBI grounder in the first inning wound up being erased.

"What if I end up with 99 RBI?" said Hunter, who's stuck on 91.

"Mother Nature got the best of us," Gardenhire said.

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Valentin